



Formation of “Houston Area Live Steamers” was founded in 1991, thanks to several future thinking individuals wanting to perpetuate the hobby.



By Greg Moore

Below is the timeline of events from the concept through the early years of HALS.

As many of you may remember, I have been asking for everyone to share with me the early years of Stack Talk so we may have a close to complete set stored on our website. During the collections I started reading them and became intrigued with the early years and formation of the club. Also included with the collections was the minutes of most of the business meetings from the beginning. When I asked how the club formed several people shared a few emails from David Hannah III, Jim Jackson, and Peter Bryan. While the basic story line was the same as you can read on our history page, the details shared even more. What you will read below is our story as collected from the many documents, newsletters, and emails.

From the many different locations offered by the county to the few members who still wanted a club on private land, to the strong interest the county had initially in us having a larger scale railroad like at the zoo, there are several twists and turns that many of us never knew about.

Mid 1850's toy trains made of wood and metal began to appear.
1891 First mass marketing of model trains in Germany
1901 Lionel invents its first electric powered trains
1950's Toy trains are the number one toys for boys
1972 SWLS Club founded
1985 [Browning RR](#) started laying groundwork in Chapel Hill TX.

In late 1990 or early 1991-time frame, a gentleman by the name of Joe Farrugia was making numerous visits to the Browning Plantation and the Browning Railroad. One day Joe was talking to David Hannah III's father-in-law, Dick Ganchan at the plantation and the question of what would happen to David Hannah's track, if the Browning Plantation was ever sold.

The conception of HALS occurred at Bruno's BBQ at Waller in July of 1991, when a group stopped for dinner after a workday at David Hannah's III Browning RR in Chappell Hill. The first scare of the Browning being sold had surfaced earlier that day, and while they all enjoyed the fun participating as one of the Browning's BVD Boys (Brazos Valley Division. Joe was good with acronyms). The mood was somber as they talked and ate, but then Joe announced, "Houston needs a live steam club with its own track." He believed a club track would be a step

toward perpetuation of the hobby in this area. It would bring everyone together, and perhaps just as importantly, it would bring out those who had neither the money nor space to build their own track.



Jim Jackson on the Rio Grande, Browning Division

A Club is Needed

The group of Live Steam enthusiasts began to investigate the idea of forming a new club devoted to the preservation of the heritage associated with the Age of Steam. The primary focus of the club was to be live steam locomotives, boats, and machinery. These comments set Jim Jackson into motion. Jim started looking at organizational structures of other clubs and found the perfect plan to build HALS. At the same time, he sent out surveys to 34 prospective members on August 10, 1991. Almost by return mail, 33 surveys came back with support for a formal organization and the next step was to hold an organization meeting.

Organizing Starts

September 5, 1991 - An organizing meeting was held and a Formation Committee was created to recommend a Club Name, Form of legal entity, rough draft of by-laws, estimated cost and income sources, officers for first year, and any other matter of importance to the formation of a new club. The committee members were Jim Jackson, David Hannah III Walton Sumner, Mark Seibert, and Nathan Neuse.

During the organizing meeting Jim Jackson discussed some of the early preliminary meetings he had been having with the county. Harris County was interested in adding a railroad to its park system and willing to help financially with providing the necessary facilities. Harris County also expected us to carry the public on the trains.



The issues with insurance for liability were discussed at length including the cost to handle insurance and operating cost. The people in the organizational meeting wanted the formation committee to first get a set of by-laws, candidates for office and avoid any commitments to the county at this time. There was also the concern that the County may be wanting a large scale commercial railroad suitable for passenger handling. The committee was also asked to get a firm fix on prospective membership.

October 3, 1991 - At the organization meeting the formation committee presented their report and recommendations. All recommendations were accepted with little change. The by-laws presented had minor amendments needed and were approved.

Jim Jackson reported on the visit to the Browning RR by the county representatives. That resulted in the county recognizing that the 7-1/2" gauge is not a good size for moving large crowds and thinking in terms of both a hobbyist activity and a people moving activity which would share the same facility.

November 7, 1991 - At the third organizing meeting of the Houston Area Live Steamers, 18 charter members voted to adopt a set of by-laws that would govern the new club whose official name would become the "Houston Area Live Steamers". **With that vote the Houston Area Live Steamers was born.** The recommended slate of the first officers was elected by voice vote.

A list of proposed sites was presented by Mr. John DeBissonet of the Harris County Engineering Department. Several Bear Creek Park areas and the site next to the Radio Control Airplane Field south of IH -10, north of Westheimer Parkway. The county would later remove the Bear Creek site because of the flooding situation, and the Corp. of Engineers told Harris County there would be no more construction east of the entry road to the Bear Creek Community Center.

Two days later November 9th, HALS sponsored its' first public run day at the Greenridge & Western Railroad which has since relocated to Colorado. Since that date, HALS has sponsored many public run days at various private tracks in the Houston region. The most famous track was David Hannah III's

private [Browning Railroad](#) located on the Browning Plantation in Chapel Hill, Texas.

December 5, 1991 - At the Membership meeting Mr. DeBissonet outlined two more possible sites for a club railroad. These sites were a newly acquired land in Katy and land across the road from the Bear Creek Park Community Center. A time would be set to walk the area across from the center.

Bear Creek Park was considered first but later ruled out after heavy rains flooded the area. With so many issues arising around the sites presented by the county, at the January 15, 1992, meeting the club revisited the option to use private land and again agreed the use of county land remains the best choice.

March 26, 1992 - At the HALS membership meeting, Jim Jackson reviewed his meeting with Walt Peckham of the County Parks Department. The list of sites has changed to non-reservoir sites since the cost (\$18,000 per member) and various levels of government that must be consulted would be too burdensome. Three new sites were then proposed, Four Seasons Park near Katy, Land between Hockley Community center and the maintenance yard and Zube Park east of Hockley. Lee Balkum pointed out that since Zube Park was in the development stage we would be included in the initial planning.

April 30, 1992 – Jim Jackson worked with Walt Peckham to establish the balance of what the county would and would not pay for. A plan like the Farm and Ranch Club was adopted.

Locations for HALS Proposed by Harris County

1. Precinct 3 Zoo (Bear Creek Park)
2. Picnic Area (Bear Creek Park)
3. Farm & Ranch Club Area (Bear Creek Park)
4. Area adjacent to Radio Control Airplane Field south of IH -10, north of Westheimer Parkway (Cullen-Barker Park)
5. Newly acquired land in Katy
6. Land across the road from the Bear Creek Park Community Center
7. Four Seasons Park near Katy
8. Land between Hockley Community center and the maintenance yard
9. Zube Park east of Hockley

Park Selected

May 1992 - Zube Park was then selected, and HALS has been there ever since.

June 4, 1992 - With Zube Park selected, work began building track panels by the membership while Jim worked with the county to adjust the park agreement to terms that we could operate under. Jim shared a letter from Steve Radack approving our request to become a concessionaire with the county and waived deposit requirements until the agreement is signed, estimated to be about 6 months later.



Focus then turned to track components and then funding for the track.

August 8, 1992 – At the membership meeting the initial track plan was approved and motion for the board to inform the county where we want the roadbed work done.
November 2, 1992 – Reviewed changes needed to By-laws into agreement with the corporate charter. Changes needed to the contract with the county were agreed to and authorized Jim Jackson to submit such changes to Harris County.

February 1993 Jim Jackson reports the concessionaire's agreement still in review with county legal department with no issues expected.

Filing for IRS section 503C is planned



March 1993 Name that railroad contest closes with a vote to select *Cypress Creek & Southern R.R.*

April 1, 1993 – Harris County engineering department has not released the land/track plans. Some members are having issues waiting on government approvals and want to revisit the private land option.

May 1993 HALS received IRS approval for 501c (7) status

Formal Agreement Signed with Harris County
[May 17, 1993 HALS President Mark Seibert signs agreement](#) creating formal relationship between HALS and Harris County. We now have 15 acres at our disposal to begin construction of our railroad. After we supplied the track plan to the county, they began to build up the needed roadbed for the track. With the roadbed prepared it was our responsibility to start laying track.



[September 25, 1993](#) HALS placed its' first section of track on the ground at Zube Park.

[October 10, 1994](#) torrential rains hit the Waller County prairie sending flood water down Little Cypress Creek wreaking havoc with the track laying on Phase I, wiping out about 75% of the track.



[April 8, 1995](#)- Construction of the turntable begins.



Phase I Completed

October 21, 1995 - HALS celebrated a major milestone by completing over 1500 feet of phase 1 main line track. Read about the opening day of the Cypress Creek & Southern Railroad and the Golden Spike Ceremony in the [November 1995 Stack Talk](#). During the phase 1 construction, Harris County, under the leadership of Commissioner Steve Radack, built an engine house and machine shop as well as a "maintenance of way" facility.



March 11, 1996, HALS held their first public run day at Zube.

Then in January 1997, Harris County built a picnic pavilion near the steaming bays at Zube Park.

December 1997 David Hannah III donates all track and buildings from the Browning RR to HALS. We had until April 1998 to get all the track and buildings moved to HALS.

In 1998, HALS again witnessed the powerful forces associated with heavy rain as several hundred feet of track floated away one wet and windy day. Facing adversity head on, HALS developed a new system to anchor the track and then proceeded, over the next 2 years, to build phase II which nearly tripled the length of the track. Harris County also built restroom facilities and a station pavilion as part of the phase II plan.



In the year 2000, Harris County again showed their commitment to HALS by building a new car barn, a locomotive back shop, and a large, permanent parking area for the public. The crowning event of 2000 was witnessing Commissioner Steve Radack drive the ceremonial gold spike that signaled the completion of phase II on April 15, 2000. [Phase II Golden Spike Ceremony Page.](#)

June 2000
HALS receives
Hot Penny a
steam engine
lovingly built by
Marshal Black



November 2000 HALS LNR 13 arrives at the track donated by John Mayo.

In 2001, Harris County continued to support HALS by clearing the right-of-way for the new phase III section of

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track. Zube Park also received a major contribution from the county in the form of landscaping around the gazebo and in front of the passenger station. In addition, many large trees have been planted to provide shade at several of the passing sidings located along the main line.



The November 15, 2001 - Public Run Day set a new milestone with 2003 free rides given in a single day.

2002 began with the redesign of the departure and arrival tracks at Cypress Creek Station to facilitate better passenger flow on run days. These changes proved very successful as HALS surpassed 2000 free rides several times during the year. Construction began on phase III with major advances being made in establishing the roadbed through the swampy section between the Cedar Bend Bridge and the South Swale Bridge. Track work was completed from Sumrall to Caliente and the foundation was laid for the South Swale Bridge.



[Phase III Ceremony Page](#)

*Our history will continue
as long as we have so
many wonderful members with a passion
for model railroading, and the great
support from the Harris County Parks
Department.*



I wish to say "Thank You" to all the people that shared photos, copies of the emails and other documents including meeting minutes. All can be found in our Members section of our website hals.org.

Greg Moore

The page header is designed to replicate the earlier style Stack Talks.